

## ABSTRACT

### SOCIAL WORK

FRANK, KISHA

B.S.W. CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY, 2004

#### A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE ATLANTA URBAN LEAGUE

#### EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAM

Advisor: Dr. Sarita Davis

Thesis dated May 2004

This evaluation examines the effect of the Atlanta Urban League (AUL), Inc. employment training program for disadvantaged individuals. The employment training program provides services of career counseling, job development, job placement, and resume preparation. This evaluation focuses on the basic skills training service of the program, which include English as a Second Language (ESL), computer training, literacy training, and General Education (GED) classes. The sample consists of 1,000 participants who were enrolled in 2000-01. The sampling frame was obtained from individual case files of all participants for the selected year in the basic skills classes. The participant's case files were provided by the agency without any background information for the participants such as age, race, or gender. The measure included secondary data analysis, interviews, and a logic model to assess the programs effectiveness. Descriptive and simple statistics were used to analyze and present data for clearer results. Findings revealed that the AUL employment training program was ineffective in increasing enrollment and employability skills for long-term employment.

The results from this evaluation will provide modality for AUL and other employment training programs by improving their program outcomes.

A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE ATLANTA URBAN LEAGUE  
EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAM

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY

KISHA FRANK

WHITNEY M. YOUNG, JR., SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

MAY 2004

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Without struggle, there is no progress.”

-Fredrick Douglass

First, I would like to thank God for keeping and blessing me through the struggle. I want to thank my father, Ron Frank. I truly thank you for your encouragement and support throughout my academic and career decisions. Thank you goes to the rest of my family for their continued love and support. Thanks, Nisa, for keeping me motivated and focused. A special thanks goes to Dr. Sarita Davis for her advisement and patience. Thanks go to my social work sisters, Shy Sharif and Makesha Ahmed. I would also like to thank my mentor, Dr. Hamilton, for her genuine support. Heartfelt thanks goes to Mrs. Gould and Dr. Makeba Thomas for being supportive and accessible even through all the drama. To my Clark Atlanta University sisters, Dawnesha, Rosie, Maude, Danielle, Minty, Diane, and Stephanie, hang in there. Lastly, I want to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my mother, Joyce Frank. I miss you and will always feel your spirit.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In today's society, unemployment is a major obstacle among disadvantaged persons. This chapter discusses the purpose of this evaluation, provides an overview of the employment training program of the Atlanta Urban League (AUL), Inc., provides a statement of the problem, and provides the significance of the evaluation and concludes with a summary of the chapter.

#### Purpose of the Evaluation

Self-sufficiency in maintaining employment among the disadvantaged is a growing problem in metropolitan Atlanta. Related studies revealed that Atlanta's unemployment rate has slightly increased within the last year. The Georgia Department of Labor (2003) reported that the unemployment rate in metro Atlanta rose from 4.7 percent in 2002 to 5.5 percent in 2003. Meanwhile, the current statewide unemployment rate is 4.5 percent. Recent efforts to address this problem have resulted in employment training programs finding new measures to evaluate their effectiveness (Ashenfelter, 1978). The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of the Atlanta Urban

League's employment training program in preparing disadvantaged workers for employment.

### The Program

The Atlanta Urban League is a private, nonprofit social service agency, affiliated with the National Urban League. Founded in 1920, the Atlanta Urban League was established to help address some of the social and economic issues that plagued disadvantaged persons in Atlanta. The mission of the agency is to encourage, assist, and engage in activities which lead to improved opportunities for the people in the community. The services of the Atlanta Urban League consist of, but not limited to, community development, healthcare, employment training, education, and housing (Atlanta Urban League, Inc., 1994).

The employment-training program of the Atlanta Urban League was designed to (a) create employment opportunities, (b) prepare unemployed and underemployed job seekers with necessary job skills, and (c) assist with obtaining and retaining employment. This will gradually help participants learn how to support themselves in becoming more self-sufficient. The employment-training program specifically provides services of career counseling, job development, job-placement, and resume preparation. However, this evaluation will only focus on their basic skills training services, which include English as a Second Language (ESL), computer training, literacy training, and General Education (GED) classes (Atlanta Urban League, Inc., 1994).

### Statement of the Problem

Within the last couple of years AUL has not been successful with evaluations on their employment-training program. The findings from these evaluations consisted of descriptive data that only focused on a summary of the total number of participants enrolled in the program and how many participants graduated from each service of the program. In reference to the basic skills service, their goal of increasing employability skills has not been met. As a result, this type of analysis has hindered AUL with their evaluations of not meeting their intended goals for the employment-training program. This observation concludes that the employment-training program has not been able to link its goal to an identifiable problem, therefore collecting irrelevant data used for their program evaluations.

### Significance of the Evaluation

This evaluation will help improve the efficacy of AUL employment training services. Program evaluations are applied to research that is designed to accomplish some task rather than simply build knowledge (Yegidis & Weinbach, 2002). The data collected from this program evaluation will be used to (a) strengthen existing services, (b) target effective services for expansion, (c) identify staff and volunteer training needs, (d) develop and justify budgets, and (e) focus board members' attention on programmatic issues.

On a global scale, program evaluations are important in maintaining funding. Recently, the Bush administration proposed a \$505 million reduction for job-training programs authorized under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). Given the absence of empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of these programs, the administration felt that their request for decreases in funding is a move in the right direction. In addition, the administration explains that rather than continuing to spend tax dollars on job-training programs that are unproven or have insignificant positive effects on participants, the funding could be more effectively allocated to reduce the federal government's budget deficit. As a result, WIA programs need to be rigorously evaluated to prevent the termination of their funding and program (Muhlhausen, 2002).

### Summary

This chapter gave a general overview of the program being addressed in this evaluation. The focus of this evaluation is the effects of training programs on the disadvantaged in sustaining long-term employment. The problem is the lack of funding and support in maintaining these programs. Evaluations of employment training programs are also important in measuring the success and failure rate of these programs. The following chapter provides an empirical review of the literature on the evolution of employment training programs, the effectiveness of skills training programs, and barriers to employment.



## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviews existing literature on similar evaluations as it relates to this study. More specifically, the literature addresses studies conducted on the foundation of employment-training programs, effective skills training programs, and the prevalence of barriers. Limitations of the literature are also discussed followed by the proposed evaluation and conceptual framework.

#### Evolution of Employment Training Programs

Federal programs that were intended to improve the lives of the economically disadvantaged through work initiatives, including the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) were originally created during the 1930s. During the 1960s, the federal government established job-training programs for the unemployed and economically disadvantaged. These programs provided remedial education, vocational training, on-the-job training, subsidized work experience, basic life-skills training, and job search assistance. Programs funded under the Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA) of 1962 were originally planned to re-train workers dislocated by technological advances. However, MDTA programs were

superseded by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), which was designed to decentralize control of federally sponsored job-training programs (Muhlhausen, 2002).

Bloom and Michalopoulos (2001) examined research suggesting that there is no agreement regarding the ability of MDTA programs to increase the incomes of the economically disadvantaged. Some evaluations of MDTA have found that the program increased incomes. While other examined studies reported a combination of outcomes including positive, negative, or no effect on income. Similarly, CETA lacked consensus over the effectiveness of job-training programs. Evaluations of this program also indicated mixed results and findings that revealed the income of most CETA participants declined.

While the evaluations of MDTA and CETA had reports of mixed results, all of these studies suffered from methodical imperfections. This reduced their ability to measure the impact of the programs they researched. Borus (1978) explain that these studies were quasi-experimental in design and were likely to show evidence of selection bias. Selection bias occurs when there are pre-existing differences between the intervention and control groups that affect outcome measures. The evaluations of MDTA and CETA were not rigorous enough to inform policymakers sufficiently about the effectiveness of job training for the disadvantaged.

Nearly a decade later, CETA was replaced with the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). Bloom and Bell (1995) conducted a study concerning the effectiveness of JTPA's training for the disadvantaged. The JTPA program evaluation tracked the

effectiveness for three types of job-training activities. The activities consisted of classroom training, on-the-job training, and other services. The population included 15,981 out of 20,601 men and women adults and out-of-school youths. Adults mainly received job-search assistance, customized occupational-skills instructions, and on-the-job training. Youth were enrolled in basic education courses along with “tryout employment”, where participants were hired on a probationary status to learn the job. This study took place over a 30-month time span. Findings showed the incomes of adult women participating in on-the-job training initially increased. However, this impact gradually declined during the follow-up period. Classroom training for adult men and women failed to raise the incomes of participants also. In sum, JTPA programs were ineffective in raising the incomes of adult males or male and female youths, while only the other services had a sustainable impact on adult women.

### Effectiveness of Skills Training

A number of recent federal policies, like the 1996 law that established the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) welfare program, have in different ways required low-income adults to find employment immediately. This “work first” approach has hindered these individuals from developing the necessary job skills that would lead them to better jobs with family sustaining wages and benefits. This policy shift that moved away from skills training and toward work first strategies developed

from the misconception that training is not effective. Government sponsored research such as the Greater Avenues to Independence (GAIN) Evaluation showed low-income adults who receive training do no better in the job market than people who do not receive such services (Martinson & Strawn, 2002).

The GAIN study, located at the Riverside County site, was publicized as a model work first strategy. An estimated 60 percent of its participants received education and training as part of their plan for entering the job market. This type practice made the program look different from what is now characterized as “work first.” After the GAIN evaluation, Riverside program changed, and fewer people attended education and training. Subsequently, the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS) evaluation showed that the newer Riverside program was much less effective than the older model that employed a mixed strategy of both employment and training services (Martinson & Strawn, 2002).

Similarly, NEWWS researchers placed Portland JOBS into their broad employment-focused category. This sent an indication that Portland emphasized quick job placement to the exclusion of skills development for its clients. In comparison to Riverside, Portland also provided pre-employment education and training opportunities to participants. The combination of basic education and training lasted about a year, and allowed their clients to enter skilled jobs with wages, benefits and stability that put the program ahead of other sites (Smith et al., 2002). However, toward the end of the NEWWS Evaluation, the program had to change drastically to meet the mandate of

welfare reform. Program staff was coerced into placing fewer individuals into education and training (Smith et al., 2002).

Another study lead by Ashenfelter (1978) analyzed existing research on the effectiveness of skills training programs. There were a number of studies within this research that had documentation of how occupational training has helped low-income adults significantly improve their employment and earnings in the labor market. Some of these studies were before and after comparisons of trainees' employment prospects prior to and after training. While the other studies were head-to-head comparisons measuring the achievements of job training participants against those of other low-income adults who did not receive services, or who received only by job search assistance (Ashenfelter, 1978). Findings revealed that skills training could increase earnings. Several of these programs that serve low-income adults have documented annual earnings impacts of anywhere from 10 percent to 156 percent. This outcome compared beyond what similar job seekers had been able to gain without training or with job search services only. Many of these increases were the result of access to jobs with higher hourly wages, as well as increases in the number of work hours available to them. The research also proved that skills training could improve access to employer-paid benefits. Participants in skills training stand a better chance of getting jobs with benefits (e.g., healthcare, retirement plans, and paid leave) than do non-participants.

## Barriers to Employment

A study on the disadvantaged population of TANF recipients displayed high rates of barriers related to health. This evaluation showed that these individuals are more likely to suffer from physical or mental health problems that limit employability than the general population. The findings revealed 32 percent of non-employed TANF recipients had a physical problem that limited them from working (Goldberg, 2002).

Brown (2001) conducted a study that examined the relationships between certain barriers and the likelihood of employment among a group of women who received welfare. Some barriers had a particularly distinct effect on employment. Results found that recipients who had poor physical health were limited in performing moderate activities; only 39 percent were working. Among those without such physical health problems, 62 percent were employed. The study also found that the likelihood of employment decreases harshly and significantly as the number of barriers increases.

The national Post-Employment Services Demonstration estimated one in five families had housing problems as a barrier to keeping a job. While different in nature than a physical or mental impairment, inadequate or unaffordable housing can also make it difficult for a parent to retain employment. This study concluded that these housing conditions could lead to frequent moves, which can disrupt job attendance and performance (Goldberg, 2002).

### Limitations of the Literature

The literature reviewed provided pertinent information about the efficacy of employment training program evaluations. The cited evaluations identified numerous programs in which pre-employment training significantly improved employment outcomes for low-income adults. Unfortunately, these results have been overlooked or misinterpreted due to several reasons. Authors suggest that occupational training was not distinguished from other types of education that were not designed to achieve immediate employment outcomes. As a result, different approaches were put together under the same education-focused category, thereby confusing the employment emphases and gains attributable to occupational training strategies (Smith et al., 2002).

The evaluations also did not focus on individual effective practices. These evaluations often measured the average impact of a number of individual training programs that were slightly different in the specific strategies they used to move people into local jobs. As a result, these evaluations were not set up to identify what particular practices qualitatively distinguished the effective training programs from the ineffective ones. Moreover, good outcomes were averaged with poor outcomes, thus producing a conclusion of minor impact.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in this evaluation is based on a system theory perspective. Biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy developed this theory in 1936. He felt the

need for a theory to guide research in several disciplines due to prominent parallels among them. Bertalanffy believed that if multiple disciplines focused their research and theory development efforts, they would be able to identify laws and principles which would apply to many systems. This would allow scholars and scientists to understand various system characteristics such as wholeness, differentiation, order, equifinality, progression, and others. With a common framework, scientists could better communicate their findings with each other and build upon each other's work. As Bertalanffy's theory emerged, scholars from many disciplines discovered that the concept of general systems theory applied equally well to their own fields, such as chemistry, physics, and the social sciences (Bertalanffy, 1968).

A system is defined as greater than the sum of its parts. A system is also described as "a group of units so combined as to form a whole and to operate in unison" (Bertalanffy, 1968, p. 91). The make-up of systems theory is when any action, whether social or biological, causes a reaction within its own environment. The action also changes the relationship of that object to all other objects in its environment. These changes or adjustments alter the overall system to which they belong.

The AUL employment-training program consists of systems involving the family, the participant, the community, and the agency. Each system is interconnected in relation to the goal of gainful employment. Barker (1999) states that general systems theory focuses on wholeness and causality in interactive rather than those of linear terms. If one system is affected then all the other systems that make up the wholeness will lose its homeostatic state.



### Proposed Evaluation

The proposed evaluation is an assessment of the effectiveness of the Atlanta Urban League Employment Training Program. Based on the program objectives, the evaluation questions are as follows: (a) how many new job opportunities were created for the participants, (b) how many participants were trained in the basic skills services, and (c) how many participants retained current jobs?

### Summary

In summary, the employment literature on program efficacy is inconsistent based on the presenting results. The findings were marred by unclear variables and aggregate data and analysis. Consequently, the need to clearly deconstruct the employment training process using clearly defined process and outcome data is critical to effectively evaluate a program.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

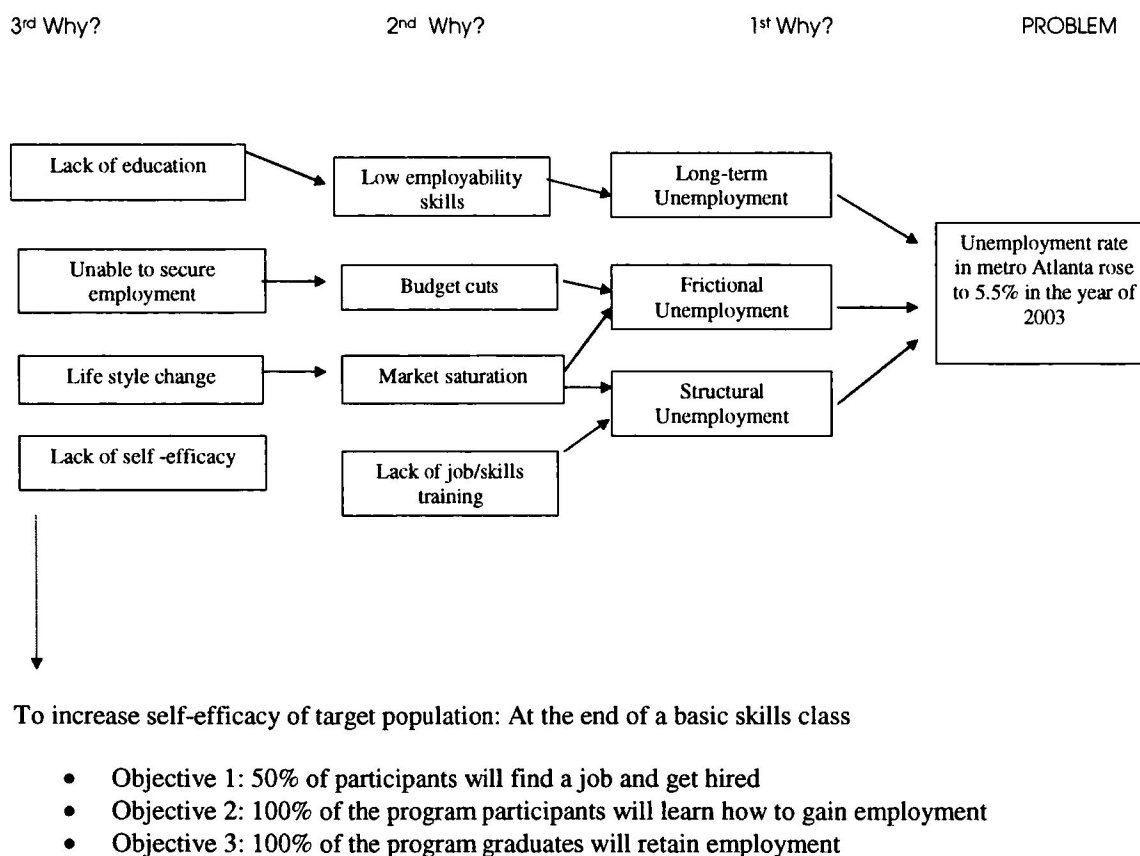
This evaluation will assess whether the AUL employment training program is meeting its intended goal of increasing the number of participants being placed in gainful employment. The population consists of 1,000 participants during the year of 2000-01. This chapter explains in further detail the sample, measure, and design used in this evaluation. The procedures are also reviewed.

#### Sample

The population for this research evaluation consisted of 1,000 participants of the Atlanta Urban League's employment training program during the year of 2000-01 (AUL is located on Edgewood Avenue, in Atlanta, Georgia). The sampling frame was obtained from a total of individual case files of all the participants for the selected year. The case files were provided by the agency. Background information on the participants such as age, race, and gender were not available for the analysis of the results.

## Measure

Several instruments were used to assess program effectiveness in this evaluation. These tools included (a) secondary data analysis, (b) interviews, and (c) a logic model. The defined variables used in this measure specifically targeted data on the total number of participants and graduates of each basic skills service. Follow-up interviews were conducted in 2002 by staff members to record the progress of each participant.



*Figure 1. Atlanta Urban League Logic Model: Employment Training Program*

The logic model used in the measure provides clearer information of the underlying rationale or logic of the AUL employment training program. Renger and Titcomb (2002) defines a logic model as “a visual representation of a plausible and sensible method of how a program will work under certain conditions to solve identified problems and is fundamental to program evaluation” (p. 36). In addition, the logic model identifies the characteristics of the program’s target population by defining the groups according to broad labor market skills and their causal factors.

### Design

The design notation for this study is:

XO

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effects of employment training for disadvantaged persons on gainful employment. The study uses XO design notation, also know as the one-group, posttest only design. This is the most basic of all research designs (Yegidis & Weinbach, 2002). The “X” represents the intervention, which is the employment-training program. The “O” represents the measure, which is the application form and follow up interviews administered by the agency. This design was used to evaluate whether change occurred, and whether the programs services influenced these changes. The internal validity threat to this evaluation is mortality. Mortality is when the research participants are lost to the researcher in the course of research (Yegidis &

Weinbach, 2002). Within the time period of the evaluation, the mortality reflected several participants dropping out of the program.

### Procedures

The data collection process took place in the year of 2002. An approval letter (Appendix A) was given and signed by the agency's director. This allowed the evaluator gain access to the information needed from the collected data. After all the data was collected, the researcher began a statistical analysis of the results.

### Statistical Analysis

The data was analyzed using descriptive and simple statistics for clearer interpretations of the results. Statistical Analysis is common in conducting and assisting the evaluator in drawing conclusions on the researched data.

### Summary

The purpose of chapter 3 was to explain how the research was evaluated and conducted. This chapter provided imperative information on how the sample, measure, and design were carried out. The statistical analysis section addressed how the data were analyzed and interpreted. The next chapter will present the findings from this evaluation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter reveals the findings from this evaluation. It presents a limited amount of statistical data on important areas of demographics of the participants and other relevant information. Consequently, these results showed that AUL was ineffective with their employment-training program goals.

#### Demographics

The evaluation consisted of a sample of 1,000 participants. Background information involving age, race, and gender were unavailable to the evaluator due to insufficient tracking by AUL. It was also reported that all of the enrolled participants graduated from the program. However, there is no data on how many of these graduates were able to obtain and retain employment.

#### Summary

This chapter presented limited findings for the evaluation using descriptive data provided by the agency. Although these findings revealed statistics on enrollment and graduates of the program, information regarding the identification of how many

participants received employment was unavailable. Implications for this limitation will be discussed in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

This chapter examines the results of the evaluation, along with discussions relevant to the findings. The data from the logic model and proposed evaluation questions indicates that the Atlanta Urban League Employment Training Program was incapable of attaining their goals of increasing enrollment and employability skills in basic skills training. Their goal for the selected year of 2001-02 was to have an estimated 3,500 total number of participants with the expectation of all of the participants obtaining and retaining employment. Factors that contributed to this decline will also be discussed in further detail.

Out of the three evaluation questions proposed, only the second question: “How many participants were trained in basic skills services?” was addressed. The findings revealed that 1,000 participants were enrolled and trained. However, demographic information regarding race, gender, and age were unavailable to the evaluator.

The remaining evaluation questions: “How many new job opportunities were created for the participants?” and “how many participants retained current jobs?” were not able to be addressed. This resulted from inadequate tracking and data analysis by the AUL staff.



The Atlanta Urban League explains that the reason for this unsuccessful outcome was due to the reduction in staff, an inadequate tracking system, and an inconsistent follow-up process. These factors had a major impact on the enrollment and employment retention. Other causes stated included barriers of mental and physical health impairments, homelessness, lack of childcare, and a criminal record. However, statistics on this information was unavailable to the evaluator due to insufficient tracking of these participants.

The findings from this evaluation also related to the systems theory, which is identified in the conceptual framework. Each system within the AUL employment-training program (i.e., participant, family, agency, and community) is connected in the goal of gainful employment. However, these systems were interrupted when the program experienced limitations that hindered their goals from being attained.

### Limitations of the Evaluation

There are several limitations that hindered this evaluation. The limitations recognized included the data collection and analysis. The data collected was improperly tracked by the AUL staff. Resulting in missing information on the participant's demographics and employment status follow-ups. The importance of tracking involves more than the input of program participation and graduation. Other information stated in the proposed evaluation section along with demographics is relevant also.

### **Suggested Research for Future Practitioners**

It is recommended that more employment-training programs be evaluated on their effectiveness. This kind of information will help similar agencies like the Atlanta Urban League improve their program's outcome. Another suggestion is for agencies to enforce staff training workshops on how to properly track and follow-up on their clients. Therefore, preventing inadequate or inconsistent information on the outcomes of the services provided.

### **Summary**

The findings revealed AUL was unsuccessful in increasing enrollment and long-term employment. Relevant literature on other employment program evaluations was presented to provide reasons for this outcome. Implications for social work practice will be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

This chapter presents a discussion on the importance of this evaluation in the social work profession. Suggestions are provided for practitioners to improve their skills and service quality to the disadvantaged population seeking gainful employment. Other recommendations include the need for more evaluations on social service agencies, specifically employment-training programs.

The results from this study will provide modality for other community-based agencies and practitioners in the social work profession. It is important for community agencies and clinicians to examine not only how well clients are served who come to them but also how great a contribution their program makes in solving a particular social problem, to meeting a particular need. The implications for social work practitioners also suggest that program evaluations are a necessary component of making advancements in the profession. According to Walls, Misra, and Majumder (2002), a program evaluation includes collecting, analyzing, and interpreting client data as a basis for an assessment of service needs, patterns of use, program outcomes, and efficiency of services offered. If community-based agencies are not evaluated, they may minimize on the services they are providing. Social workers need to become more familiar with evaluation procedures and

methods, so they can provide a step-by-step path to increase people's employment prospects.

### Summary

In sum, this chapter related the presented findings from the evaluation to the field of social work. Implications suggested that more employment-training evaluations be completed for improved service outcomes.

## APPENDIX A: SITE APPROVAL LETTER

We, \_\_\_\_\_, give Kisha Frank permission to conduct a program evaluation of our agency for the sole purpose of completing the degree requirements for the Master of Social Work at Clark Atlanta University. It is understood that Kisha Frank will receive the necessary information to help her fulfill these requirements.

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Researcher/ Evaluator- Date

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Site Liaison- Date

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